

2975 Laurel Street #20
San Diego, California 92104
March 22, 1988

Editor
Barvo! San Diego
4620 Park Blvd.
San Diego, California 92116

Dear Editor,

Your last two editorials which criticized tactics used by ACT UP San Diego, failed to consider several important and relevant points. I think that some of those points deserve public comment.

The January 11th demonstration at the Mayor's State of the City address had the very positive result of a proposal by Councilmembers Struiksma, Pratt, and Filner for the allocation of \$250,000 of unencumbered funds for immediate use for direct services to PWA's. These councilmembers are not radicals or fools, nor do they lack understanding of the political process.

After nearly two months of orchestrated delays by the Mayor's office, the AIDS-funding proposal that finally was considered by the PS&S Committee on March 2nd ignored the possibility of using the unencumbered funds "located" by Councilmember Struiksma, and proposed funding cuts in other worthwhile programs in order to come up with \$150,000 for AIDS agencies. (What happened to the proposed \$250,000 and the idea of using budget surplus?) In response to the distorted proposal generated by the City Manager's office (at the Mayor's direction), Struiksma stated, "If I had wished to have a report generated that would pit one councilman against another councilman, and agency against agency, I couldn't have done a better job than that done by the City Manager in this report."

The funding proposal that was considered on March 2nd deserved to be defeated because it was such a distortion of the original proposal—not because of the Mayor's claim that there is no crisis and no plan for spending the asked-for funds. On the contrary, there are PWA's living in cars, laundromats, and on the streets of San Diego. (See San Diego Union article of March 2, 1988.) Further, there have been multiple plans drawn up by the Regional Task Force on AIDS, the AIDS Assistance Fund, and the AIDS Project clearly outlining the need and programs to address those needs. That information is in the hands of every City Councilmember, including the Mayor. With that knowledge, it becomes clear that the Mayor's spokesperson intentionally misrepresented AIDS agencies on this point.

A full-time health planner/economist is needed to "cost-out" these programs. The City has refused to provide any staff toward this effort. After many months the county is "considering" hiring someone. Another "Catch-22" situation for the PWA while the City and County continue bad-faith political maneuvering.

ACT UP San Diego's disruption of the Council on March 14th was not designed to change the Council's position on AIDS Funding. It was designed to

register rage and protest at the City's refusal to make an appropriate and good-faith response to the local AIDS situation. It was intended to wake this City up and create some serious dialog on the real issues. Even detractors of the action must admit that those goals were achieved.

The assumption that the Mayor is a friend of the gay and lesbian community (and therefore should not be ruffled) is one that deserves examination. A flurry of proclamations declaring "Gay/Lesbian Pride Day", "Dr. Thomas Waddell Gay Games III Day", "Bravo! San Diego Days". etc., and marching in the parade, though they are more than we have gotten from any previous Mayor, have cost her very little. The \$150,000 that the City has provided so far is laughable in comparison to the need. And now the Mayor attempts to pit one segment of the gay/lesbian community against another (just as she divided her own Council) in order to manipulate and control. There were many alternatives open to her, but she chose divisiveness. This does not sound like the action of a friend.

Those who are afraid to protest unjust and underhanded behavior by elected officials, or, worse yet, allow themselves to become spokespersons for that unjust behavior have fallen victim to the politics of assimilation. This tactic, simplistically stated, is to assimilate minority leadership into the establishment by use of appointments and promises, and then threaten to withdraw those rewards if they don't keep "their people" pacified. It is easy to fall into the trap of thinking "I'll go along with this because I don't want us to lose what we have gained." Such thinking may get some strokes for a few people but it will not advance the cause of gay men and lesbians or the AIDS-impacted population.

I have a great deal of respect for most of the gay men and lesbians who have become our spokespersons. I admire their integrity and I realize that we may quite honestly find ourselves on opposite side of these issues. However, the dialog is important, necessary, and beneficial. For we must never be afraid to confront one another respectfully and lovingly. It is in that spirit that I offer these remarks.

In summary I reiterate the following main points. (1) The money is available, (2) the need is great, and (3) the Mayor blocked the allocation that could have eased the crisis until the next budgetary cycle. (4) That deserved public protest. The only thing that was wrong with ACT UP's disruption of the City Council was that there weren't 500 voices chanting "There is and AIDS emergency—AIDS funding now!"

Yours in the struggle,

Jess Jessop